

# On the Beat

Minneapolis VA  
Health Care System

January 2014



Veterans Creative Arts Fair Competitors



"On the Beat" is published monthly for patients, employees, volunteers and friends of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

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*Social worker Linda Vinge (L) and Debbie Schmidt, patient advocate.*

## OEF/OIF Program Receives Toys 4 Military Kids Donation; Many Items Still Available

This past December, Minneapolis VA's OEF/OIF/OND program received a donation of more than 400 toys from Toys 4 Military Kids for Veterans and Service Members of all eras who are in need of gifts for their children/grandchildren. To date, toys have been given to 21 families, totaling about 34 children who have received toys. Please inquire with Jill Vinge (x7476) if you know of a veteran who may be interested in a toy donation.



### Reaching Out Via Minnesota Military

#### Radio

Beginning this month, the Minneapolis VA will have a recurring presence on Minnesota Military Radio, which is carried on 19 commercial radio stations. The Jan 12 broadcast featured Director Patrick Kelly. For program details, see: <http://minnesotamilitaryradiohour.com/>.

**ON THE COVER – Minneapolis Veterans record performances for the 2014 Creative Arts Festival.** The competition includes 53 categories in the visual arts division this year that range from oil painting to leatherwork to paint-by-number kits. In addition, there are 120 categories in the performing arts pertaining to all aspects of music, dance, drama and creative writing. A national selection committee chooses first, second and third place winners among all of the entries. Select winners are invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival each year.

## NEWSMAKERS



**Dr. Bloomfield**

### **Dr. Bloomfield Named Associate Chief of Staff/Research**

Hanna Bloomfield, MD, MPH, has been named Associate Chief of Staff for Research for the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. She has served as acting chief for almost a year. According to Chief of Staff Kent Crossley, “Dr. Bloomfield has a distinguished career as a researcher. Until recently, she directed our Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research. She has also held leadership roles within our Primary Care PSL and at the University where she is a professor of medicine.” She received a bachelor’s degree from Harvard and both an MD and MPH from Boston University. Her research interests include Preventive cardiology, Lipids, Clinical epidemiology and implementation research

## **Minneapolis VA Receives Joint Commission Accreditation**

On January 7, the Minneapolis VA Health Care System received award letters indicating that we are fully accredited for three years by the Joint Commission survey for hospital, home care, long term care, and behavioral health programs. Thank you to all staff for your work in preparing for the survey, and to the many staff who worked very hard to bring 20 findings into compliance after the survey. While we will not have another triennial TJC survey until 2016, our work of “continual readiness” continues. Your dedication and continuous work to be fully ready to meet the needs of our patients is critically important and greatly appreciated!

## **Scott Wellsted and Wade Young Promoted to Rank of Captain**

On, January 15, Officer Scott Wellsted and Detective Sergeant Wade Young received badges from Director Patrick Kelly, promoting them to the rank of Captain. Officer Wellsted served 12 years in the United States Marine Corps. After a four year break from service, while attending college, he joined the MN National Guard and retired in 2013 as a 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant with 27 years of combined service. Capt. Wellsted has five sons and has worked for the Minneapolis VA as an officer for the past 10 years. Captain Young joined the United States Air Force



**Captain Wade Young (L) and Captain Scott Wellsted**

in 1985 and remained on active duty until his retirement in 2005. After his military retirement, he began his career with the Minneapolis VA Police Department in 2005. Capt. Young started off working as a Patrol Officer and in 2008 and was promoted to Detective/Sergeant. He worked as an investigator for the VA Police until his recent promotion to the rank of Captain and Physical Security Supervisor. Capt. Young has three children and resides with his wife, Ivette, who is retired after 22 years of military service.



## FINDING REPORTED IN TOP MEDICAL JOURNAL



# Vitamin E slows Alzheimer's Progression in Major VA Study

Vitamin E, known for its antioxidant power, helped slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease in Veterans with mild to moderate symptoms in a trial reported Jan. 1 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

**Maurice Dysken,, Lead Researcher in Study of Vitamin E for Alzheimer's**

part in the VA-sponsored trial. Researchers followed them for up to four years, with an average follow-up of about two years and three months.

Although the disease progressed in all treatment groups, vitamin E slowed the disease by about six months, compared with placebo. In other terms, it slowed the worsening of Alzheimer's disease by almost 20 percent per year, compared against placebo. The main outcome measure was a test of how well the patients could perform activities of daily living.

Lead researcher Maurice Dysken, MD, a geriatric psychiatrist, says a delay of this size in the disease's progression can have a significant impact on quality of life for patients and their family members.

***"It could be very meaningful for someone with early Alzheimer's who is still functioning at a high level, and for his or her caregivers, to have a delay of six months in the progression of the disease over about a two-year period," says Dysken. "When the disease has progressed to a severe stage, the benefits of a delay of this size are less apparent."***

Dysken is former director of the Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. He is also a professor of psychiatry at the University of Minnesota.

In the study, his team compared vitamin E against three other treatments: the drug memantine (sold as Namenda), vitamin E plus memantine, or placebo. Vitamin E beat all the other approaches, including the combination treatment. Outcome measures included not only patient's daily function and cognitive health, but also caregiver burden.

In the raw data, caregivers of those on vitamin E reported about two hours less per day of caregiving activity compared against the other three groups. After statistical adjustments, though, the difference remained significant only when the vitamin E group was compared with the memantine group.

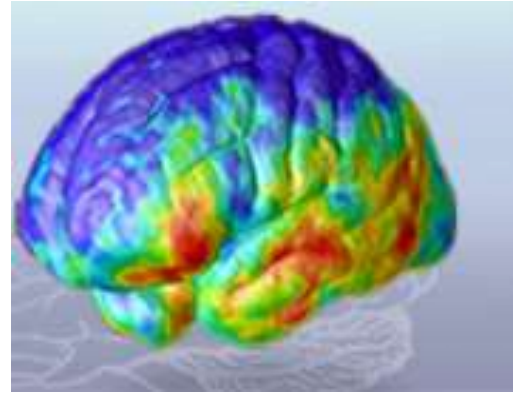
More than 600 Veterans from 14 VA medical centers around the country took

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# ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE STUDY – Continued from page 4

According to existing clinical guidelines in VA and other health care systems, memantine is generally used only for more advanced cases of Alzheimer's. It typically provides some temporary slowing of the disease. Evidence for its effectiveness in less severe cases has been lacking. The new VA study supports those guidelines.

All the patients in the study were also on a cholinesterase inhibitor drug. These medications, known by brand names such as Aricept and Razadyne, block an enzyme that breaks down acetylcholine, a brain chemical involved in learning and memory. The drugs are a firstline treatment for Alzheimer's, especially in the mild to moderate stage.



These drugs often have adverse side effects, though, particularly nausea and diarrhea. Based on the new trial results, Dysken says vitamin E is an attractive alternative, in terms of effectiveness. "We would say vitamin E is comparable to any of the existing medications." He notes that it's also less expensive.

Vitamin E supplementation is not without its own risks. Some research has suggested it may slightly increase the risk of death. No such effect was seen in the VA study.

"We looked at that very carefully as we designed the study protocol," says Dysken, "and the patients were monitored very closely throughout the trial." He notes that no patients in the trial, including those with existing heart disease, appeared to do any worse on vitamin E, compared with their peers in the other treatment groups.

Vitamin E is found in a wide variety of foods, including eggs, whole grains, and beef. But Dysken says getting the nutrient from food is unlikely to achieve the same benefits seen in the study.

"We gave patients 2,000 IUs [international units] per day," says Dysken. "That's about 20-fold greater than the dosage commonly found in a multivitamin containing vitamin E. The dose used in the study is pharmacological, as opposed to nutritional. It's really a huge difference."

Vitamin E comes in several forms, including alpha-tocopherol, which has been found to be the most biologically active in humans. The VA study used a synthetic formulation of alpha-tocopherol. Dysken says this was the same agent used in a late 1990s trial that found vitamin E effective in later stages of Alzheimer's. The new VA trial is among the first large studies to show benefits in earlier stages of the disease.

Dysken says there's no evidence to suggest other types of vitamin E supplements—such as natural, food-based formulations, versus synthetic chemical-derived ones—would have any different impact on Alzheimer's.

According to Dysken and other experts, vitamin E's effects against the brain-ravaging disease are likely due to its antioxidant properties. Researchers in VA and elsewhere are studying a variety of other antioxidants for their effects against Alzheimer's. They include, for example, compounds found in red tea, red grapes, and the spice turmeric.

Dysken says it's still "an open question" as to whether vitamin E is unique in its anti-Alzheimer's properties, or simply one of many antioxidants that could achieve the same effect.

The trial was sponsored by VA's Cooperative Studies Program. **Participating VA Medical Centers: Bay Pines, FL; Miami, FL; Iowa City; Baltimore; Jamaica Plain/Boston; Minneapolis; Ann Arbor, MI; Sallisbury, NC; Cleveland; Ralph Johnson in Charleston; Dallas/North Texas; Seattle/Puget Sound; Madison, WI; San Juan, Puerto Rico.**



## ***VA Volunteer Receives Purple Heart 44 Years After Injury in Vietnam; Classified Mission Delayed Award***



Vietnam Veteran Fred Jenness received the Purple Heart medal during a ceremony at Golden Valley City Hall on Dec. 23.

"The honor for me is the grandkids, that they have someone to look up to, and they know what has been sacrificed in the past," Jenness said, with his family gathered around him including his granddaughters, 5-year-old Breonna and 4-year-old Ella. U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar, whose office helped Jenness get the medal, spoke at his ceremony.

**Fred Jenness is congratulated by Sen. Amy Klobuchar at ceremony**

**"This is an award that is long overdue for a man who gave so much for his country," Klobuchar said.**

Jenness enlisted in the Navy and was a Seabee combat engineer, supporting intelligence operations in Ben Tre province of South Vietnam. He is the only surviving member today of his 13-member team, Klobuchar said.

On Dec. 19, 1969, Jenness was wounded in the leg when they were attacked. He made his way to a bunker and returned fire with machine guns and rockets, ending the attack as the enemy retreated. He was treated for his wounds and remained in the field; eventually, he was awarded the Combat Action Ribbon and the Vietnam Service Medal.

Even though his family and friends encouraged him to pursue the Purple Heart, Jenness never sought the medal, which is given for injuries sustained in combat. In 2004, Polk County Veterans Services Officer Rick Gates encouraged him to go forward after a simple conversation about Jenness' experience.

Jenness, who worked for the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for 34 years before retiring in 2009, reluctantly agreed. The first reaction from the Navy was to deny him the medal. It said there was no evidence that he was in combat or that he was wounded. The classified nature of his work compounded the delay, but an archivist in the National Museum of the Navy in Washington was able to find logs and records confirming the account.

Fred volunteers in the Minneapolis VA's prosthetics clinic every Friday. During his remarks, Jenness reminded the audience to remember hospitalized veterans during the holidays.



## **EXTREME COLD DOESN'T DETER FT. SNELLING HONOR GUARD**

**By Bill Hudson, WCCO-TV, Reporter**

**MINNEAPOLIS (WCCO)** — When it comes to Minnesota's weather extremes, there are some things that just can't be put on hold. On Monday, that was the case at Fort Snelling National Cemetery where 16 of the nation's veterans were laid to rest.

Near the entrance to the cemetery, an unfurled flag and snapping rope made a bitter day feel all the colder. Air temperature at noon was a frigid 17 below zero. A brisk northwesterly wind made it feel more like 35 below.

Despite the brutally cold conditions, the cemetery staff all showed up for work.

"They all showed up, they were here early to get the equipment fired up and were getting everything ready to go for the burials today," foreman Randy Peterson said.

On a terrain of white marble — and whiter snow — life and death continue. Fort Snelling National Cemetery doesn't close for winter's worst weather.

"People don't choose when they want to pass," Memorial Rifle Squad commander, Terri Winter, said.

On Monday, the cemetery had scheduled burials for 16 veterans. The families of two more deceased vets decided to reschedule their interment for another day. Of the 16 laid to rest on Monday, each of them received the presence of the Memorial Rifle Squad honor guard, complete with a 21-gun salute and two buglers playing taps.

Squad commander Winter says it's a treasured right, regardless of the cold. "We have families that are relying on us and so we're all here," Winter said.

Twenty-three members of the guard's "Monday Squad" stood at solemn attention in the bitter cold, before marching in cadence with a revered purpose.

Their frigid hands gripped firmly to the steel flag poles and their heavy rifles. But the true test of the cold was when the squad's two buglers pressed their lips to the cold metal mouthpieces, still able to play taps with precision.

For each member, it is a frigid burden they are accustomed to performing in all kinds of weather and through all seasons. "Hail, you name it, there's been times when we get back on the bus and we're covered in white, in snow. It's an act of love, truly an act of love," Winter said.

It's their final and fitting tribute to patriots on this frozen and sacred ground.

**REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF WCCO.com. For link to video story, see**

**<http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2014/01/06/extreme-cold-doesnt-deter-ft-snelling-honor-guard/>**





## Holiday Tea Brings Staff Together

Thanks to the Veterans Canteen Service and the VAMC, more than 2,000 staff enjoyed a holiday celebration of food and music on Dec.19 in the cafeteria. At left, Laurie Lacina directs the VA Choir, whose voices lifted the spirits of everyone who attended, at left and VCS staff below.



Pictured (L-R): Chris Kotich, Linda Mickelson, John Hawkinson, Elliot Vreeland, Kyle Flaherty, Jean Moy, Phillip Moy, Greg Arrigoni, John Ng, Don Ng, Shawn Wothe and John Simpson.



# Milestones—Congratulations

## 35 YEARS

Randall Burns,  
Pharmacy

## 30 YEARS

Melissa West, Extended  
Care

Shawn Collins, Specialty  
Care

Alice Otto, Primary  
Care

Lori Schmidt, Mental  
Health

## 25 YEARS

Vivian Streitz-Kern,  
Specialty Care

Kathleen Joy Valusek,  
Primary Care

Jeanette Pawelski,  
Primary Care

Faith Weiss, Mental  
Health

Susan Slivicki,  
Lab/Pathology

## 20 YEARS

Heather Moe, Primary  
Care

Debra Hanson,  
Specialty Care

## 15 YEARS

Sean Ercan-Fang,  
Primary Care

Krysten Halek,  
Research

Jennifer Reinardy,  
Primary Care

Ronald Hessler,  
Patient Care Nursing

Vernon Hendix,  
Nutrition/Food Service

Debra Wagner, Extended  
Care/Rehab

Sarah Brown,  
Pathology/Lab

Zenebech Gemta, Primary  
Care

Christine Hoffman,  
Specialty Care

Florence Turner, Mental  
Health

Bryce Davis, Extended  
Care

## 10 YEARS

Loren Getzug, Police  
Service

Andrea Cutting,  
Research

Marc Bridgers, Enviro  
Health & Safety

Anna Pratt, Primary  
Care

Matthew Crowley,  
Engineering

Arthur Kroulik  
IT VISN 23

Kimberly Paul  
IT VISN 23

Bryan Greskowiak,  
Specialty Care

Dianne Eldred,  
Education

Margaret Srnec, Imaging

Charleston Azonwu,  
Specialty Care

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